

HA-1238

Bel Air High School
E. Gordon at Franklin Streets
Bel Air
Public; demolished 1984

Orig. 1924; 1931 and 1955 extensions

The Bel Air High School (later Bel Air Elementary School) is architecturally significant as a good example of the early 20th century Classical Revival style, simplified and adapted for a small town school building. The school is also historically significant as the first school built especially for the upper grades in Bel Air. The lower grades continued in the 1883 Bel Air Academy and Graded School (HA-1409) on the adjoining lot until 1950, when it occupied the High School.

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Bel Air High School

AND/OR COMMON

Bel Air Elementary School

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

E. Gordon at Franklin Streets

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Harford

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT
☒ BUILDING(S)
☐ STRUCTURE
☐ SITE
☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC
☐ PRIVATE
☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS
☐ BEING CONSIDERED
☒ not applicable

STATUS

☐ OCCUPIED
☒ UNOCCUPIED
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS
☐ YES RESTRICTED
☒ YES UNRESTRICTED
☐ NO

ACCESSIBLE

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK
☒ EDUCATIONAL ☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Harford County Board of Education

Telephone #: 838-7300

STREET & NUMBER

45 E. Gordon St.

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

MD 21014

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Harford County Courthouse

Liber #:

Folio #:

STREET & NUMBER

20 West Courtland St.

CITY, TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

MD

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

NA-1235

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT☐ GOOD☒ FAIR☐ DETERIORATED☐ RUINS☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bel Air High School is a two story brick and frame building built in three stages in 1924, 1931, and 1955 on the south side of East Gordon Street at the intersection of Franklin Street in Bel Air, Harford County, Maryland. The main entrance is on the west elevation.

The original 1924 section of the school was built to house classes from grades 8 through 12 and consisted of 8 classrooms, a science laboratory, a typing instruction room, and domestic science, shops, and physical education rooms in the basement. The school was a rectangular flat-roofed structure with a central hall on each floor. The main entrance was on the north elevation and later became a secondary entrance. The east and west elevations clearly delineate the classrooms in their fenestration patterns. Groups of five high windows are separated by pairs of windows in smaller rooms between each large classroom on both the first and second floors.

In 1931, an extension of the first plan was added to the south end of the original section. This group of classrooms was separated on the west elevation from the older section by a main staircase. On the exterior, the stair is defined by a stone facing with a large central window and an incised inscription over the door reading "Bel Air High School" flanked by the dates 1924 and 1931. The fenestration pattern duplicates that of the original section except that the paired windows between the large classrooms are deleted. On the east elevation, a one-story gymnasium extends out from the main section. The exterior entrance is through a tri-partite arched foyer with stone quoins and trim. Stone quoins also mark the corners of the gymnasium extension.

The 1955 extension added further classrooms to the south end of the school building. The south elevation has a central stair with a large Palladian-influenced window on the second floor level.

Over the three stages of building, the original design was continued in the exterior brickmasonry. A corbeled brick cornice with inlaid geometric brickwork extends around the entire building. On the stone section at the west entrance, a corresponding incised belt course continues the line of the brick cornice. At the main corners of the building are projecting brick quoins. Stone decorative trim is also applied to the north entrance as well as the central entrance and the gymnasium extension.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
X 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) local history
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES orig. 1924; 1931 and 1955 extensions BUILDER/ARCHITECT Hamme & Witman, architects

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bel Air High School (later Bel Air Elementary School) is architecturally significant as a good example of the early 20th century Classical Revival style, simplified and adapted for a small town school building. The school is also historically significant as the first school built especially for the upper grades in Bel Air. The lower grades continued in the 1883 Bel Air Academy and Graded School (HA-1409) on the adjoining lot.

Background and Support

The Bel Air Public School (HA-1409) was built in 1883 to replace an outgrown 1870 frame school on Main Street. In 1888, the Bel Air Academy united with the Public School and the brick building was formally called the Bel Air Academy and Graded School. In 1907, the course was extended to 11 grades and the name was changed to Bel Air High School.

By the early 1920's, the building had become too crowded and a county bond issue to provide funds for a new building in Bel Air as well as in Aberdeen, Havre de Grace, Jarrettsville, and Highland was brought to public vote. The issue was approved and Highland's Agricultural School was the first built with the bond proceeds.

In 1924, the Bel Air High School was built to the design of John Bentz Hamme (1862-1952). Born in Manchester Township, Pennsylvania, Hamme entered the office of J. A. Dempwolf in York in 1881. Dempwolf was then a prominent architect in the mid-Atlantic region. Hamme entered the junior class at Cornell in 1886 and graduated in 1888. He was apparently highly regarded even then because he was offered an instructorship at Cornell, but he declined the position to return to Dempwolf's office.

In 1890, Hamme went to Seattle, Washington where he formed a partnership with John Parkinson. Returning once again to York in 1900, Hamme may have worked with Dempwolf for a short time, but soon went into partnership with Edward Lever. Hamme went on to become, like Dempwolf, a successful and fairly prolific architect in the mid-Atlantic area. In Bel Air, in addition to the High School, Hamme designed the Armory (HA-1429) and remodeled the Harford Mutual Fire Insurance Company Building (HA-1463) on Office Street.

By 1924, Hamme's partner was a man named Witman, whose first name and other personal history are unknown at this time. The firm also supplied designs similar to the Bel Air High School for the schools in Aberdeen, Havre de Grace, and Jarrettsville which were also built in the mid-1920's. All had 8 classrooms initially. The Bel Air High School was apparently designed with the intention of future expansion in mind. The 8 rooms were arranged on a

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Board of Education Capital Improvements Summary, September 1978
Harford County Directory, 1953
Our Harford Heritage, C. Milton Wright

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Janet Davis, Historic Sites Surveyor

ORGANIZATION

Harford County Department of Planning & Zoning

DATE

June 1984

STREET & NUMBER

45 So. Main St.

TELEPHONE

(301) 838-6000, ext. 207

CITY OR TOWN

Bel Air

STATE

MD 21014

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

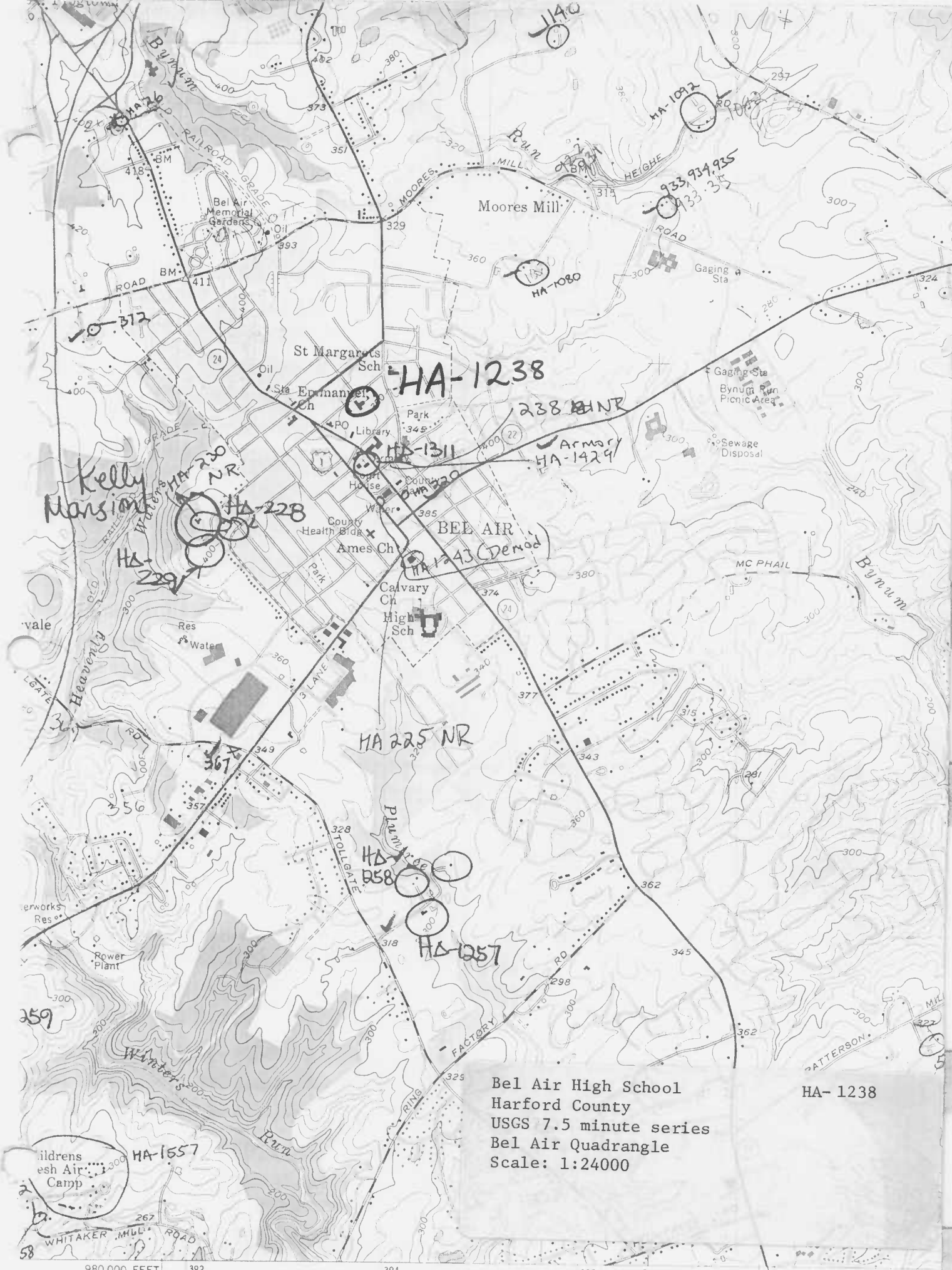
Bel Air High School

8. Significance (Continuation):

simple central hall plan in a rectangular unit near the north end of the lot, leaving ample space for extension to the south. The cost of the original section was \$55,000.

In 1931, Hamme and Witman designed the extension of the High School, which added more classrooms, the principal entrance on the west elevation, and the gymnasium, as well as administrative offices and a library. The gym also served as the auditorium and had three arched entrances with stone quoins and trim and bracket light sconces.

The school had no cafeteria and the students walked next door to the elementary school for lunch. In 1950, the present Bel Air High School was opened and the lower grades moved into the old high school building, leaving the 1883 building to be renovated as the Board of Education offices. In 1955, the final extension to the school was made on the south elevation and extensive renovations were made to the interior. A cafeteria was built in the basement. In 1968, a separate kindergarten building was erected east of the old building. Fire safety and modern educational needs demanded a new elementary school in the 1980's. The school was completed in mid-1984 on the former playground of the old building. The old school is scheduled for demolition in the summer of 1984 and the site will become the playground of the new school.



Bel Air High School
Harford County
USGS 7.5 minute series
Bel Air Quadrangle
Scale: 1:24000

HA- 1238



Bel Air High School

HA-1238

Harford County

Photographer: Janet Davis

May 1984

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

East elevation

1/5



Bel Air High School

HA-1238

Harford County

Photographer: Janet Davis

May 1984

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

South elevation

2/5



Bel Air High School

HA-1238

Harford County

Photographer: Janet Davis

May 1984

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

Interior: Main staircase

3/5



Bel Air High School

HA-1238

Harford County

Photographer: Janet Davis

May 1984

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

Interior: Third floor hall

4/5



HA-1238

Bel Air High School

Harford County

Photographer: Janet Davis

May 1984

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

Interior: Gymnasium

5/5